

Groundbreaking for Alvarado Station on the Virginia Creeper Trail

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July 6, 2010

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Good morning. I am pleased to join you here at Alvarado this morning to break ground on a significant improvement to the Virginia Creeper Trail.

Today, construction begins on a replica of the former Alvarado Train Station, which was located near this spot on the on the former Virginia-Carolina Railroad. The railroad extended 75 miles from Abingdon to Elkland, North Carolina and carried iron, timber and passengers at least weekly between those locations until the late 1970s when Norfolk and Western decided to end its run. At that time, leaders in the Towns of Abingdon and Damascus had the foresight to establish the former railway right of way as a trail.

And today, the Virginia Creeper Trail has become a premiere tourist destination and adds richly to the tourism economy of Washington County and the communities along the trail. Individuals seeking a superb outdoor experience enjoy the Trail for the hiking, jogging, horseback riding and bicycling opportunities it affords. Since the Trail's development, the number of visitors it brings to our region has steadily increased, and now more than 200,000 visit the trail annually.

The project for which we are breaking ground today will help further increase the number

of visitors the Trail brings to our region by making a ride on the trail more convenient and enjoyable. Alvarado marks the mid-point along the Trail between the Town of Abingdon and the Town of Damascus. It is an excellent location for visitors to pause while traveling between the Towns.

To make Alvarado a more convenient stop for those riding the Trail, today we are breaking ground on a replica of the former Alvarado station which will house information for visitors and restrooms. The new facility will be 800 square feet in size and will include display space of 488 square feet for information on the history of the Virginia-Carolina railroad, the Creeper Trail and the community of Alvarado. The building will be constructed of board and batten siding with a standing seam metal roof. It is expected that construction will be completed in the early Fall.

The total cost of new facility is \$343,191, which is being provided by the federal appropriation approved by Congress at my request in 2005 in the amount of \$680,000. The state is providing \$144,901 to match the federal funding. The remainder of the federal funds after the Alvarado facility has been constructed will be used to make further improvements to the Virginia Creeper Trail at Watauga, where additional parking and restroom facilities will be located.

The Creeper Trail has enjoyed tremendous federal support over the years. In the past 10 years, federal funds totaling more than \$2 million have been secured at my request for projects along the Trail, and we are making significant progress on many of these.

At the same time that I secured funds for the Alvarado and Watauga improvements, I also secured a total of \$160,000 in federal funds to improve the Whitetop and Green Cove stations. Both stations are staffed by Friends of Mount Rogers volunteers who provide information to the Trail's visitors.

Work on the Green Cove station is nearing completion. With the federal funds I secured, heating and air conditioning have been installed in the station and the building's roof and its window frames have been replaced. New window panes are scheduled to be installed later this month. All of the work that has been done on the station has been fully compatible with the original historic architecture of the building, and the new window panes have been manufactured to replicate the building's original windows. The improvements will help control the climate within the building so that the historic architecture does not suffer damage due to

moisture and other preventable issues and the station is preserved for future generations to enjoy.

In addition, construction design plans for improvements to the Whitetop Station are currently being developed, and the Forest Service hopes to begin construction in the Fall. The work at Whitetop Station will include replacing the building's exterior including all of its decks and ramps. Additionally, the building's foundation will be strengthened and a drainage pipe will be added around the perimeter of the building. This work will help address drainage issues on the site that have been causing structural problems for the station, which serves as the starting point for many individuals who are traveling the trail by bicycle.

Finally, last Summer, I announced that the U.S. Forest Service was allocating \$1,100,000 as a result of the economic Recovery Act approved by Congress to improve trestles along the Trail, and these improvements are currently underway between Whitetop and Green Cove. Some of the trestles are located in flash-flood prone areas, and the federal funds are being used to reinforce the foundations, improve the decking and perform handrail maintenance. When completed, the work on the trestles will ensure the safety of individuals enjoying recreation along the Trail.

The Creeper Trail is an excellent federal investment. The visitation the trail brings to our region has created opportunities for entrepreneurs seeking to develop or expand tourism related small businesses, strengthening our region's economy.

I look forward to working with officials from Abingdon, Damascus, Washington County and the U.S. Forest Service to further enhance the Trail and the attendant economic benefits the Trail brings to our region.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize a number of individuals who have helped advance the Virginia Creeper Trail and the improvements at Alvarado on which construction begins today.

I want to thank the Town Councils of Abingdon and Damascus for their leadership and foresight in developing and then supporting the Virginia Creeper Trail over the years. I also want to thank the members of the Washington County Board of Supervisors for their efforts on behalf

of the Trail.

Greg Kelly, Town Manager of the Abingdon, and his excellent staff have helped organize today's event, and I want to extend my appreciation to him at this time.

I would also like to thank Beth Merz and JoBeth Brown with the Forest Service for their excellent efforts on behalf of the Creeper Trail.

I also want to thank my Deputy Chief of Staff Laura Lee for her work on behalf of the Virginia Creeper Trail.

After we have broken ground on the new Alvarado station, I hope you will stay and enjoy the Creeper Trail this afternoon.